HAMS AND NASA -- TOP ACHIEVERS

[Editorial Reprinted from Amateuradio June 1983]

When Challenger roared into orbit in April, the world was once again reminded of the technological supremacy of the United States. A few days later NASA announced that Astronaut Owen K. Garriott, who is a dedicated ham radio operator, would be permitted to take an Amateur Radio station along on the flight of STS-9 scheduled for launch on September 30. Still later in the month of April, another branch of the government released a report indicating that the U.S. educational system was becoming a sea of mediocrity.

Many of the people who have helped make NASA what it is are Amateur Radio operators -- hams. They got their start in ham radio back in the early school days. Amateur Radio provided hands-on, real-world experience for the theory they learned in school, but it also provided them with something more. Amateur Radio is a hobby of learning, doing and achieving. There are five levels or classes of licenses that range from the beginner's Novice Class License to the top-drawer Amateur Extra Class License. Each level is achieved by passing tests requiring demonstration of increased skill and understanding.

The emphasis on achievement does not end there. Several organizations, including the American Radio Relay League (ARRL), sponsor annual contests that are won by those who put out the effort and whose skills are razor sharp. Coveted plaques and awards are bestowed on those who earn them by demonstrating their skills in other over-the-air activities.

So it is not surprising that many of the top achievers in the space program, as well as all other areas of technical endeavor, are Amateur Radio operators. While they were sharpening their technical skills with ham radio, they were also learning life skills that would bring them personal success and would bring success to those employing them later in life. It is altogether

fitting and proper that Garriott should have an Amateur Radio station on board STS-9 to use when he is not working.

Now we are told that the U.S. school system is becoming a sea of mediocrity. It is a product not of achievement, but of the lunacy of the 1960s. Although some may call for a panacea by dumping lots of money into education, we do not believe things are so simple. The lack of adequate funds does not necessarily mean a program is doomed to failure. (Nor do unlimited funds ensure success.) For instance, since the late 1960s, NASA's budget has been slashed to the bone. The cutbacks in NASA's accomplishments have been in scale, not quality. Money is not the only factor.

ARRL will continue to do what it can to attract youth to Amateur Radio, because we believe it is good for the long-term health of the nation. ARRL will continue to urge local Amateur Radio Clubs to work with their respective school systems to encourage active Amateur Radio programs for the students. ARRL will continue to emphasize achievements and high standards for Amateur Radio operators. There is no guarantee that a teenage ham will grow up to be an astronaut (or president of a multi-million dollar electronics company), but you never know . . .

For more information, contact the Public Information Office, ARRL, 225 Main St., Newington, CT 06111. Phone 203-666-1541.

Amateur Radio on STS-9 - Contact Sheet

For more information please contact

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STOP PRESS !!!

THE STS-9 MISSION LAUNCH DATE HAS BEEN CHANGED FROM SEPTEMBER 30 TO OCTOBER 28.